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Hoops and Horses: Innovative Approaches to Oral History in a Digital Environment

by **Doug Boyd** (Director, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries) <doug.boyd@uky.edu>

The **Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History** at the **University of Kentucky Libraries** began collecting oral histories in 1973. Relying on grants and gifts for most of that time, the **Nunn Center's** survival depended, in large part, on innovation and entrepreneurship. The **Nunn Center Collection** contains nearly 8,000 interviews totalling over 30,000 hours of recorded interviews including interviews with politicians, farmers, midwives, civil rights leaders, authors, educators, athletes, veterans, and coal miners. Over the past eighteen months, the **Nunn Center** has dramatically altered how it collects and provides access to its interviews within an entrepreneurial and innovative framework that is interwoven with changing user expectations.

Horses: Creating Lasting Partnerships

The equine industry is a \$4 billion signature industry for Kentucky. In 2005, the **Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)**, the governing body for international equestrian sport, announced that the 2010 World Equestrian Games would be held in Lexington, Kentucky. The World Equestrian Games are held every four years and determine the world championships for eight equestrian sports. The 2010 games in Lexington will be the first WEG competition held outside of Europe and will have a tremendous economic impact on the city.

Over the past three decades collecting horse related oral histories had been sporadic at best. A major new effort to conduct interviews with representatives from the horse industry coincided with the WEG announcement. We determined immediately to attempt to tie our project into the international competition. The **Nunn Center's** Horse Industry in Kentucky Oral History Project records the firsthand experiences and stories of people who work with horses in Kentucky. Our purpose is to build a collection that represents the diversity of the equine community and fosters a better understanding of and appreciation for the historical, cultural, and economic significance of the horse to Kentucky. Project staff conduct interviews preserving the history of racing and non-racing breeds in the commonwealth, as well as the numerous and sometime unique occupations supporting the equine industry. If you will excuse the pun, we felt strongly that in order to effectively fund the project, the horse community in Kentucky needed to pony up, so to speak, and support the project financially.

We formed an advisory board that included the Chief Executive Officer of the **United States**

Equestrian Federation and the **First Lady of Kentucky** serving as an honorary chair. This board's role was to assist with developing important partnerships as well as assisting in the process of identifying project interviewees. Project partners included:

- **KEEP (Kentucky Equine Education Project)**
- **Kentucky Thoroughbred Association**
- **Kentucky Oral History Commission**
- **Kentucky Downs**
- **Keeneland Foundation**
- **Kentucky Derby Museum**
- **Kentucky Horse Park**

After doing ten strategic interviews the project created a brief, award winning video featuring interview excerpts streamed from the **Nunn Center's** Website. The informational video served a critical role in describing the project to a media savvy community, maintaining a high profile for the project and, most importantly, selling the project to the horse community.

As of 2009, we raised over \$65,000 and conducted more than 100 interviews statewide. We are now transcribing and uploading the interviews online, and public radio segments featuring the horse project debuted May 2009. We are beginning phase two of the project, focusing on Web access and raising additional funding to conduct additional interviews that focus specifically on the thoroughbred industry and its importance to Kentucky. The plan is to launch the oral history project online in a highly visible manner. We believe that the interactive manifestation of the project will be key to obtaining future funds to maintain the core project. Our greatest success with the horse project has been building partnerships. The online face of the project was empowered by an unlikely source, the equipment manager for the **University of Kentucky** men's basketball team.

Hoops: Innovation In Access

William B. Keightley worked with the **UK** men's basketball team from 1962 until his death in March 2008. Known affectionately as "Mr. Wildcat," he was revered by the Big Blue Nation that is Kentucky basketball. **Keightley** served every Kentucky coach including **Adolph Rupp**, **Joe Hall**, **Rick Pitino** and **Tubby Smith**, and he witnessed three national championships. In 2005 the **Nunn Center** recorded the first of 25 interviews with **Keightley**. We had no inkling these interviews would become some of the more highly sought after interviews in the collection.



Following **Keightley's** unexpected death, we respectfully issued a press release about the interviews, and I quickly edited radio excerpts for a regular oral history segment I do on **WUKY**, the university's **NPR** station. **Keightley's** death created a public and emotional reaction from **UK** fans. However, **Keightley's** collection had not been fully processed. The interviews were not transcribed, making it difficult to know their detailed content. I did not want to put full interviews from such a high profile project online before checking for issues that might create problems for the **Center** later.

In the months following **Keightley's** death, **UK Athletics** explored how they might use the upcoming basketball season to pay tribute to **Keightley** and celebrate his legacy. However, they were not including the **Nunn Center** in the planning. In early summer 2008 **IMG**, the corporate entity that manages college sports marketing and licensing rights, contacted me. **IMG** was very interested in **Keightley's** oral histories for potential use during radio broadcasts of **UK** basketball games. I was intrigued by the prospect of offering the oral histories to such a large and diverse audience. However, with the collection still unprocessed, I remained apprehensive. So I presented a proposal to **IMG**. If they paid for the transcription and detailed item level description, as well as a final editing of the transcripts (only for accuracy of transcription and spelling, not for content) for each of the **Keightley** interviews, the **Nunn Center** could provide **IMG** the content from the **Keightley** interviews for broadcast throughout the upcoming season.

As a result, **IMG** gave \$10,000 to transcribe and properly process the **Keightley** collection. The goal was to complete the preparation of **Keightley's** full interviews and launch online access to the full interviews by the opening game. After all, this opportunity guaranteed the **Nunn Center** a statewide audience (and beyond on the Web) in which we were featured each game throughout the season. But the interviews were not simply put online. The **Nunn Center**, in collaboration with the **Kentuckiana Digital Library (KDL)**, timed the **Keightley** launch to coincide with the debut of our newly redesigned online oral history interface.

I have long been concerned with how to effectively provide access to oral history content online. I want to refine the way we provide our content online — not just metadata, not just finding aids, but digital content as well. If a digital collection is placed online and the interface for accessing the interviews is not user friendly, the repository may have increased the potential audience for those archival materials, but functionally, access will more closely resemble the access models represented by

continued on page 24

reading rooms, boxes of tapes and stacks of printed transcripts.

Oral history is a complex information package with separate components: audio/video, text, and metadata. A further complication is that the audio/video interview or its textual representation is usually rather lengthy. Although the different components of the interview (audio/video, transcripts, and metadata) are relational, they are mostly treated as separate items by the typical content delivery system. One can search text and metadata extensively, but when it comes to linking the text or metadata with the specific correlate embedded in the audio and video interview, the systems usually fall quite short of user expectations.

In my imagined "model" online oral history interface, I wanted the words of the transcript and metadata to interact with the words and concepts embedded in the recording. I wanted to explore a solution that presented this information package according to a series of rules I refer to as LESS: Logical, Effective, Simple and, most importantly, Scalable. This seemed essential as I contemplate access to an oral history collection of nearly 8,000 interviews approaching 30,000 hours of content.

UK Libraries' Digital Programs had already begun experimenting with a system that inserts time markers in the transcript text. I worked with **Eric Weig**, Head of **Digital Programs**, to redesign an interface to search full text of transcripts and display time landmarks within the transcript. These landmarks in the transcript are hot-linked to provide access points to the correlating segments in the audio recording.

The new oral history interface empowers users to search text and to navigate within one minute of the search result in the corresponding audio file. Users can quickly navigate the audio, transcript and metadata, and both discover and pinpoint the specific textual or conceptual information they seek. (See Figure 1: New KDL Oral on page 26.)

History Interface

In addition to redesigning the user interface, we needed to dramatically redesign the process for preparing the interviews for online delivery utilizing embedded time landmarks in the new interface. We developed a custom software solution we call OHMS (Oral History Metadata gatherer and Synchronizer). OHMS guides the audio and text synchronization and additional metadata gathering, as well as serves as a project management tool for synchronizing and uploading the resultant interview. As the synchronizing process performed manually can be quite tedious and error prone, OHMS' game-like quality and workflow enhance the experience and provide a more precisely synchronized end product. OHMS has made the process of time chunking the interviews more accurate and efficient as a **Nunn Center** employee can sync an hour-long interview now in approximately 12 minutes.

The **Keightley** project was the perfect project with which to debut the new oral history

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in California, raised in Ohio.

EARLY LIFE: Cincinnati, OH.

FAMILY: Wife and three kids (all girls under 6 years old).

EDUCATION: BA History, **Denison University**; MA and Ph.D. Folklore, **Indiana University**.

FIRST JOB: Played vintage keyboard instruments in a rock and roll band.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Director of the **Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History** at the **University of Kentucky Libraries**. Previously, managed the Digital Program for the **University of Alabama Libraries**, served as the Director of the Kentucky Oral History Commission and was the Senior Archivist for the oral history collections at the **Kentucky Historical Society**. Currently the media review editor for the *Oral History Review* and co-general editor of the oral history series at the **University Press of Kentucky**. I specialize in digital technologies associated with the collection, preservation, and digital publication of oral histories.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Did I mention that I have three kids under 6?

PHILOSOPHY: Have serious fun – always.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: TBD.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see a growing emphasis on the unique materials found in special collections departments in forging an academic library's future identity. New and exciting modes of digital access further drive demand for the processing and preservation of these hidden collections. At the same time, there are increasing opportunities for special collections and libraries to reach new audiences, and forge creative collaboration and partnerships. 🐾



interface and to refine our OHMS workflow. The project was featured prominently on the front page of the sports section in the Lexington *Herald Leader*, and our radio segments won two statewide awards including an **Associated Press Award** for Best Sports Feature. Excerpts from **Keightley's** interviews were featured at many **University of Kentucky** basketball games, the **Keightley** interviews were used online several thousands of times over the course of the basketball season and beyond. On each segment listeners heard, "The **Bill Keightley** Oral History project is available at the **Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History** at the **University of Kentucky Libraries** and can be accessed online at <http://www.kdl.kyvl.org>."

The high profile of the **Bill Keightley** project succeeded for the **Nunn Center** on many levels. However, the project benefited our larger library and archives efforts as well. The **Keightley** project opened the door to discussions with the **UK Athletics** and renewed interest in the development of a formal athletics archive. The **UK Athletics** gave \$50,000 to digitize and make portions of our Athletics

Archives holdings accessible online. Athletics programs, especially at schools like **UK**, have the financial ability to assist in both oral history and archival efforts that ultimately pay good dividends to athletics. Our modest oral history project on "Mr. Wildcat" has been used as major leverage to advance efforts the **UK Libraries** had been trying to accomplish for decades.

Oral history provides tremendous opportunities for an academic research library to collect crucial primary source materials for their special collections. But it can also be a tremendous tool for outreach and community engagement. The **Nunn Center**, a fairly nimble entity in the library system, has traditionally taken a proactive and intentional approach to oral history projects, recognizing gaps in the historical record and acting to construct relevant and historically important projects. The **Nunn Center's** underlying principles have always involved strategically planning our projects, cultivating relationships and collaborations to successfully implement innovative projects, and recognizing opportu-

continued on page 26

Hoops and Horses ... from page 24

nities, as well as having patience and careful timing as those opportunities unfold. Each interview constructs a partnership between the **UK Libraries** and that individual, and therefore, each interview becomes not just a documentation of the past but an investment in the **Libraries'** future. 🐾

Rumors from page 16

the first half of 2009 showed disappointing results, especially regarding advertising revenue. On the block will be the majority of the US titles (including *Broadcasting and Cable*, *Design News*, *Graphic Arts Monthly*). *Variety*, and several other titles will be retained and become part of **RBI Global**.

<http://www.dnnews.com/Reed-Business-titles-back-on-the-block/article/140934/>

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6674558.html>

And I almost forgot to tell y'all that *The Charleston Advisor* (www.charlestonco.com) had an editorial board meeting in Chicago, and

continued on page 38

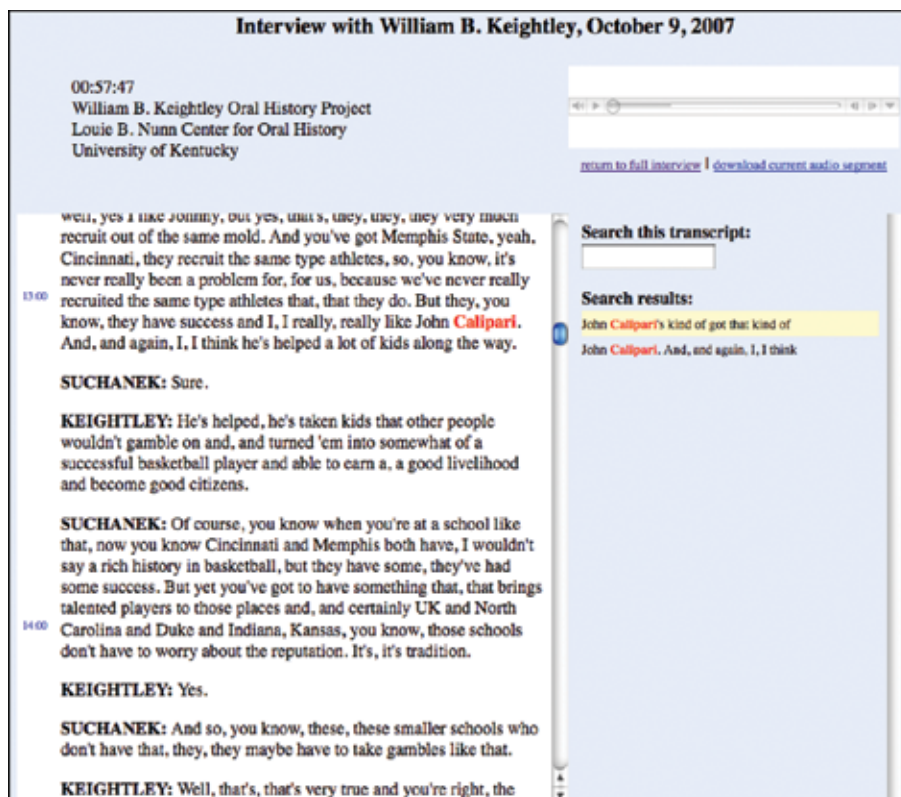


Figure 1: New KDL Oral

Money, Money, Money

by **Adam Corson-Finnerty** (Director of Special Initiatives, University of Pennsylvania Libraries)
<corsonf@pobox.upenn.edu>

The most financially and programmatically sound non-profits are those which have multiple streams of income. In the case of the academic library, these streams can include allocated funds, donations, endowment income, fees and fines, and perhaps “monetizing your assets.”

To put it boldly: monetizing assets means that you develop ways to make money from the use of items that you own. These “items” could be books, images, sound recordings, paintings, or bits of computer code.

Here are some happy examples of such activity. The **Carnegie Museum of Natural History** licensed the right to reproduce its models of dinosaurs as children’s toys. The result has been millions of dollars of income for its programs and projects. The **New York Historical Society** has partnered with the *New York Times* to sell high-quality reprints from its Audubon bird collection. The **Metropolitan Museum**, the **Museum of Modern Art**, and many other art museums make money by reproducing objects from their collections, or putting images on playing cards and coffee mugs.

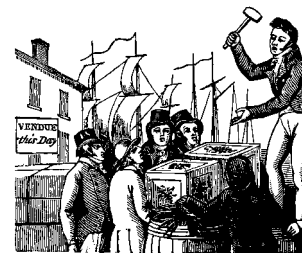
So, what about the world’s libraries? We have lots of “stuff,” right? How can we make some money from this stuff, without compromising our mission and degrading our reputation?

Since July 2008, this has been my territory, due to a bold experiment on the part of the Director of the **Penn Libraries**. Urged on by a business-oriented advisory board, the Director asked me to undertake a thorough two-year study of “income-producing” opportunities for possible adoption.

What follows is a mid-term report from the front.

OK. So you have been hired as the first full-time in-house “entrepreneur” for your library system. Your job is to discover and recom-

mend “income-producing” ideas for the library to consider undertaking. Where do you start?



Defining Terms

The first place to start is by defining what is meant by the term “income-producing.” It sounds obvious, but I suspect that many people who hear this term will immediately translate it as “profit-making.” That is incorrect. Further, it is counterproductive.

You and your colleagues need to consider a range of revenue possibilities from partial cost recovery to true “profit.”

Four Levels of Income:

Partial cost-recovery: activity generates some return, but doesn’t cover full costs.

Cost-recovery: activity generates enough income to pay for itself.

Cost-recovery plus: activity or project earns money beyond start-up and maintenance costs. Additional income can be used for expanding, refining, and maintaining the program. (What some might term “sustainable revenue.”)

True Profit: activity or project earns money beyond anticipated project needs and costs, including indirect costs. Surplus income can be used for *other* library activities.

It is important to look at all levels of potential income, since earning even ten cents for each dollar you are spending on a project or service is better than earning no cents. Therefore, when you investigate income opportunities, don’t ignore opportunities for partial cost recovery. Such revenue will add up.

continued on page 28